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## OBSERVATION AND PRACTICE IN COURSES FOR TRAINING RURAL TEACHERS

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One of the most difficult problems which the state school system of Wisconsin is attempting to solve is how, effectively, to train teachers for rural schools. This study deals with those phases of the problem which relate to observation and student practice teaching. For the purpose of making more intelligible the data to be presented, it is desirable that a brief survey be given of the various agencies for the training of rural school teachers in the state.

The state maintains three types of schools whose business is, in whole or in part, the training of rural teachers. Such schools are, in the order of the establishment of specialized courses for this purpose, county training schools, of which there are twenty-eight; state normal schools, six of which have rural-school departments; and high schools, twenty-seven of which have been designated by the state superintendent to carry on this work. These schools are under state control.

The county training school is a vocational school whose sole business is the training of rural teachers. The salaries of its teachers are paid by the state; the building and the equipment are furnished by the county government. In these schools two courses are offered: a one-year course for high-school graduates and a two-year course for graduates of common or graded schools. By this arrangement a high-school graduate has five years of work above the eighth grade, the last year being professional work taken in the county training school. Graduates of graded schools have two years of work above the eighth grade. In these courses are offered those subjects required in the examination of candidates for second-grade teaching certificates. These include reviews of common-school branches, algebra, English history, English literature,

arithmetic, American history, school management, observation, and practice teaching.

The course of teachers of rural schools offered in state normal schools is one of many different courses presented. It includes a review of common-school branches with the addition of botany, zoölogy, composition, American literature, methods, observation, school management, psychology, and practice teaching. At least one state normal school maintains a model rural school, where observation and practice teaching are carried on. Such normal schools are not vocational schools exclusively, for they offer, in addition to various courses for the preparation of rural-, grade-, and high-school teachers, two years of college work.

Twenty-seven high schools have been selected by the state department of education in which courses for the training of rural-school teachers are maintained. This is in accordance with an act of the legislature passed in 1913 which requires professional training for all who apply for a certificate to teach in the schools of the state, who had not taught prior to July 1, 1914. This act provides that professional training may be given at a high school, if at least three teachers exclusive of the principal are employed. The act provides, further, that the state shall reimburse the high school in an amount equal to the salary of the teacher giving the professional work.

The course of study is divided into three sections: first, required professional work. This consists of the following branches: (1) junior professional reviews, 1 unit; (2) senior professional reviews, 1 unit; (3) senior pedagogy,  $\frac{1}{2}$  unit; (4) practice work, school law, 1 unit; (5) observation and school management,  $\frac{1}{2}$  unit. The second division of the course of study includes required academic branches. These are English, 3 units; geography,  $\frac{1}{2}$  unit; arithmetic,  $\frac{1}{2}$  unit; United States history, 1 unit; citizenship,  $\frac{1}{2}$  unit; physiology,  $\frac{1}{2}$  unit; agriculture, 1 unit; domestic science, 1 unit. The required work covers 8 units of work. The third section of this course of study comprises elective academic branches. This covers 3 or 4 units of work. These units may be in Latin, or geometry, or algebra, or in any branches considered suitable by the high-school principal.

This study concerns itself with that part of the professional work entitled Practice Work and Observation, for, it is in administering such courses that one finds himself in an uncharted sea. Questions like the following continually arise: When and where should observation begin? What subjects should be observed? What records should be kept? In what grades should practice work be carried on? How much should be required? etc.

In order to ascertain current practice in administering such courses in Wisconsin, an inquiry was sent to each county training school and to each high school engaged in training teachers for rural schools. The inquiry was as follows:

#### OBSERVATION

1. When does observation begin?
2. How many recitations are observed per week? In what subjects?
3. What records are kept of these observations? What use is made of these records?
4. Do students observe the regular classroom teacher or the training teacher?
5. How much observation is done in country schools? Does county superintendent take students to country schools while he is on his regular inspection trips? Does he accompany classes?
6. How many times does the student observe the class which she is to teach?

#### PRACTICE WORK

1. When is practice teaching begun?
  2. In what grades is practice work done?
  3. How many class periods does each student teach per week?
  4. How many weeks of practice work is required of each student?
  5. What subjects are taught by student teachers?
  6. What subjects are *required* of each student teacher?
  7. How many consecutive recitations are taught in each subject?
  8. Does student teacher practice in regular grade room? If so, is she in charge of the room?
  9. If student does not teach in grade room, where is teaching done?
  10. Does more than one student teach in the same room at the same time?
- What is the average size of class taught by students?

Replies were received from twenty-two of the twenty-eight county training schools and from every high-school training department in the state. An analysis of the data obtained follows:

## OBSERVATION

When does observation begin?

TABLE I

	JUNIOR YEAR	OR WEEK OF SENIOR YEAR						
		1	2	3	4	5	First Quarter	Indefi- nite
High-school department...	9	6	8	2	1	1	.....	.....
County training schools...	2	3	.....	.....	.....	1	10	6

Table I is to be read as follows: nine high-school departments and two county training schools begin observation work in the Junior year, which is the first year in which any professional work is offered. The remaining schools offer observation work in the Senior year. Six high schools and three county training schools beginning observation the first week of school, eight high schools beginning the second week of school, etc. The replies of the county training schools were indefinite, ten schools stating that the observation begins during the first quarter and six merely stating that such work is given in the Senior year. Upon further inquiry it was found that experience has demonstrated the advisability of beginning observation work as early as possible. Next year most of the schools offering this work will begin observation in the Junior year.

How many recitations are observed per week?

TABLE II

No. of Recitations	1	2	3	4	5	Over 5
High-school training department.....	1	6	2	2	6	10
County training schools.....	1	2	.....	1	6	6

TABLE III

IN WHAT SUBJECTS OBSERVED?

Subject	Reading	Arithmetic	Geography	Language	Phonics	History	Music	Writing	Spelling	Physiology	Gymnastics
High schools.....	27	27	23	27	16	17	....	13	13	14	....
County training schools....	17	15	16	16	8	8	9	8	10	....	1

Tables II and III give the answers to question 2 of the inquiry on Observation. From Table II it is seen that the majority of high schools and county training schools require five or more classes to be observed each week by students. Every high-school department requires observation in reading, arithmetic, and language. Nine county training schools require observation in music. No high school emphasizes this. High schools as a rule observe work in physiology. This subject was not mentioned as being observed by classes in county training schools. The table indicates that the chief emphasis in observation is placed on reading, arithmetic, geography, and language. Sixteen high schools and fifteen county training schools observed work in all of the grades.

The answers to question three under Observation indicate that in only three high schools and in two county training schools are there no records of these observations kept. All the rest make notes and outlines which are used as a basis for class discussion and as a reference for future teaching.

In fifteen high schools and in fourteen county training schools the work of the regular classroom teacher, only, was observed, while in eleven high schools and in four county training schools the teacher in charge of observation work taught demonstration classes for the benefit of the training-course students.

TABLE IV  
AMOUNT OF OBSERVATION DONE IN RURAL SCHOOLS

No. of Days	None	1	2	3	4	5	Over 5	Indefinite
High schools . . . . .	.....	2	6	2	2	8	1	6
County training schools.	1	.....	8	1	.....	8	1	2

Observation of the regular work in a rural school is extremely important. Here only can prospective teachers see teaching done under normal rural conditions. Yet no rural schools were visited by one county training school. The distribution appears to be bimodal, two and five being the most frequent numbers of visits made. The means of transportation presents a serious difficulty in attempting rural-school visitation, yet the problems of the one-room country school are of such a nature that they can be studied

best where they occur. At least five days per year should be spent in visiting and observing the work in these rural schools.

The latter part of question 5 under Observation was asked in order to ascertain the amount of co-operation between the county superintendent of schools and the schools where the teachers whom he supervises are trained. The inquiry revealed the fact that this official accompanied classes on their visits to rural schools in seven cases reported by high schools and in five cases reported by county training schools. Seven high schools and three county training schools reported that the county superintendent carried one or more students with him on his regular inspection trips. These figures do not reveal any great amount of co-operation between the professional schools for rural teachers and the inspectors of their product. Surely no better opportunity to become acquainted with prospective teachers can be found than is given by such trips. Here there is need of reform. It is common knowledge in one county of the state that the chief administrative school official has neither visited nor inspected the training course for rural teachers since its establishment.

TABLE V  
HOW MANY TIMES DOES STUDENT OBSERVE CLASS WHICH SHE WILL TEACH?

Times	1	2	3	4	5	Over 5
High schools.....	1	2	4	0	13	7
County training schools.....	1	8	1	1	10	1

According to Table V, the student in the average high school or county training school will visit a class for observation purposes five times before she begins to teach the class. The usual custom is to visit a class each day for a week prior to entering upon teaching. When the pupil has taught the required time in one subject, she spends several days in observation again before beginning to teach another subject.

The school year of the county training school is forty weeks in length. The eleventh week is the beginning of the second quarter of school. Table VI indicates, then, that in county training schools, practice teaching begins, usually, at the beginning of the

first or second quarter. There is little or no uniformity among the high schools in this matter. The fifth week is both the median and the mode for the beginning of practice work. Some high schools wait until the beginning of the second semester before setting this branch of professional work into operation. The first four weeks of the high-school year are devoted to observation work and to the adjustment of the school machinery.

TABLE VI  
PRACTICE WORK: WHEN PRACTICE TEACHING BEGINS

Week	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	16	18	19	21
High schools . . . . .	...	2	1	2	9	5	1	1	1	1	1	...	3	...	...
County training schools.	6	1	...	...	1	...	...	...	...	...	6	1	...	4	2

Table VIII shows the effect of local administrative difficulties. In some schools, particularly in county training schools, only a few grades are available for practice work. In a few of the county training schools are found model departments of from four to six grades. Other county training schools do their practice work in the city schools. Grades one to six inclusive contain the pupils which most nearly approximate these of rural schools in age and

TABLE VII  
IN WHAT GRADES IS PRACTICE WORK DONE?

Grades (inclusive)	2-4	3, 4	1-4	1-5	1-6	1-7	1-8
High schools . . . . .	1	...	2	4	10	5	5
County training schools.	...	1	5	...	10	2	3

progress. This is evidenced by the fact that ten high schools and an equal number of county training schools use these grades for practice teaching. Trempealeau County in Wisconsin has 106 rural schools. In 1914, there were graduated from these schools 55 pupils. In 1915, the graduates numbered 90. This means that the average is less than one eighth-grade pupil per school. It also indicates that there is little necessity for practice work beyond the sixth grade, for there are very few pupils in the rural schools more advanced than this grade.



The number of weeks of practice work required of student teachers is shown in the accompanying chart. The upper section of the chart shows the number of weeks of teaching required in each of the twenty-seven high-school departments. The lower section shows the same facts for county training schools. The number of weeks of student teaching required in each school is placed at the right of the name of the school. For the high-school departments the lower quartile is 18, the median is 20, and the upper quartile is 28. This gives a quartile range of 10. This means that the middle 50 per cent of the schools require from 18 to 28 weeks of practice work. In the county training schools the lower quartile is 10, the median 12, and the upper quartile 20, with a quartile range of 10. The middle 50 per cent of these schools require from 10 to 20 weeks of practice work. In this respect the high-school training departments appear to be stronger than the county training schools. Nine high schools require the median amount of time, while nine county training schools require but 10 weeks of practice work. The state department of education makes this recommendation: "Most teachers are finding that 20 weeks' work in practice is far more satisfactory than the 10 weeks' work that has been required. Beginning with the school year of 1915-16 a minimum of 15 weeks of practice should be required of all students in high-school training departments, and 20 weeks is strongly recommended. This lengthened period makes it possible for every student to teach at least three classes for 5 weeks each."

Chart B indicates the subjects, required or elective, which are taught by practice teachers in high-school training departments and in county training schools. The chart is to be interpreted as follows. Triangles whose altitudes are on the left and nearest to the names of the high schools which maintain training departments refer to these schools. Triangles which point to the left refer to county training schools. Solid triangles indicate those subjects required to be taught in high-school training departments. Triangles with horizontal bars refer to required subjects in county training schools. Triangles shaded by vertical bars indicate subjects which may be selected either by student or by supervisor.

Every high-school department in the state requires practice work in reading. The same requirement holds for all county training schools with the exception of two. Arithmetic occupies much the same position in high schools, being required in all schools but two. Four county training schools make the teaching of arithmetic elective. Seventeen out of twenty-seven high-school training departments require language to be taught. About one-half of the county training schools make this requirement. Geography is an elective in the majority of schools. Less than half of the schools offer history and spelling even as an elective. The chart indicates clearly where the stress is laid in practice teaching. Evidently reading, arithmetic, and language are considered the basal subjects and are named in the order of their importance. County training schools offer a wider range of subjects for practice work than high schools do. Many subjects indicated as electives are elective from the supervisor's standpoint rather than from that of the pupils.

Table VIII is to be read as follows: In high-school training departments the median class taught by students has from 9 to 11 pupils in it. The median for county training schools is 15 and over. The size of the class used by students in county training schools is determined more by necessity than by choice. Many such schools must take what they can get from public-school authorities. A class of from 6 to 8 would more nearly approximate

TABLE VIII  
SIZE OF CLASSES TAUGHT BY STUDENT TEACHERS

Size	6-8	9-11	12-14	15 and over
High schools . . . . .	4	13	3	7
County training schools . . . . .	2	4	5	11

the actual rural class in size. In many rural schools, the majority of classes have an enrolment of less than 5. A class of 15 is too large for a student teacher to handle when she begins her practice work. So, for the purpose of approximating working conditions in rural schools, and as a matter of expediency, the size of practice classes should be reduced in many schools.

In attempting to draw conclusions from this study one is confronted with the fact that the problem of training rural teachers effectively has not as yet been solved. There is too great a diversity of procedure to enable one to picture conditions as they should be. It is evident that the various agencies for carrying on the work of training rural teachers have not co-operated in a way that would enable each to profit by the other's experience. Yet many facts stand out which are of value for comparative purposes.

With reference to Observation, experience shows the advisability of beginning it as early in the course as possible. Stress in observation is laid on reading, arithmetic, and language. The work in rural schools should be observed in as great quantity as possible. Before students begin their practice teaching in any subject, they should observe the work in that subject under the regular classroom teacher for some time. Practice work in one subject at a time extending over a period of at least 20 weeks is more valuable than practice in several subjects at the same time for a shorter period. This practice work should include teaching in arithmetic, reading, and language for all students in some one or more of the first six grades. Classes taught by student teachers should not be larger than 6 to 8 pupils. Co-operation between county superintendents and such training schools, co-operative studies carried on by a number of schools, unity of aim and harmony in administration, are required for the successful solution of this important problem.